DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 431 841 UD 033 003

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TITLE	Scheduling Alternatives: Options for Student Success. By Request Series.
INSTITUTION	Northwest Regional Educational Lab., Portland, OR.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1997-02-00
NOTE	48p.
CONTRACT	RJ96006501
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; *Alternate Day Schedules; *Block Scheduling; Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; *Extended School Day; Program Descriptions; Time Factors (Learning); *Year Round Schools

ABSTRACT

This booklet is part of a series of reports on "hot topics" in education. It explores alternative school schedules as ways to make education be the best it can for all students. Block scheduling, 4-day school weeks, and year-round education are alternative scheduling methods that generate interest in schools in the northwestern United States and around the country. The data that would reinforce claims of the effectiveness of these schedule changes is relatively inconclusive at this time, but many districts that are adopting these new schedules are finding many advantages. Benefits, concerns, and implementation issues are outlined for each of these approaches to nontraditional school schedules. The alternative schedules of seven schools in the northwestern United States are described. (Contains 31 references.) (SLD)

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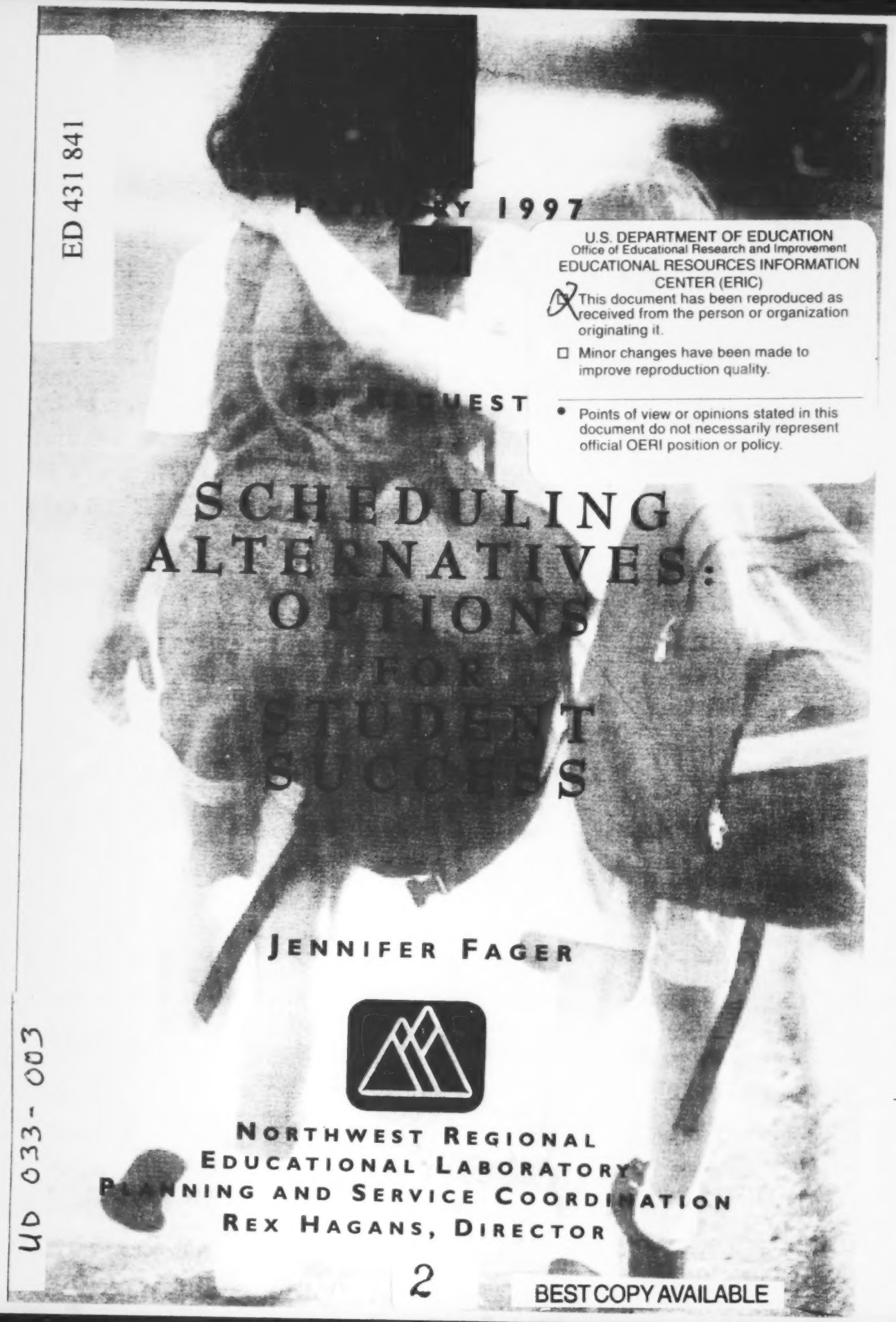

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FEBRUARY 1997

SCHEDULING ALTERNATIVES: OPTIONS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

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PLANNING AND SERVICE COORDINATION
REX HAGANS, DIRECTOR

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FOREWORD

This booklet is the third in a series of "hot topic" reports produced by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. The series attempts to be a looking glass for specific topics in education, reflecting back to educators the requests they make of the Laboratory. These reports briefly address current educational concerns and issues as indicated by requests for information that come from the Northwest region and beyond. Each booklet contains an explanation of the selected topic's relevance, a sampling of how Northwest schools are addressing the issue, suggestions for adapting these ideas to schools, selected references, and contact information.

One objective of the series is to foster a sense of community and connection among educators. Another objective is to increase awareness of current education-related themes and concerns. Each booklet will give practitioners a glimpse of how fellow educators are addressing issues, overcoming obstacles, and celebrating success in specific areas. The series' goal, ultimately, is to give educators current, reliable, and useful information on topics that are important to them.

INTRODUCTION

In today's climate of renewed emphasis on educational change, educators are continually looking for ways to improve school climate, increase teacher job satisfaction, make the most of school facilities, and enhance student learning. Many schools are finding that modifying, or even abandoning, traditional methods of scheduling can help them as they work to achieve these things and to make education the best it can be for all students.

Block scheduling, four-day school weeks, and year-round education are alternative scheduling methods that generate intense interest in schools in the Northwest and around the country. Educators want to know if these methods actually work. Though data that reinforces claims of actual achievement gains is relatively inconclusive for each at this point, it seems that more and more schools who choose to adopt an alternative schedule are finding numerous advantages associated with the change.

This booklet is an exploration of block scheduling, four-day school weeks, and year-round education. It is one of many resources available to schools and communities as they contemplate new options for school improvement. The definitions and ideas behind each option are examined, along with the potential benefits and possible concerns associated with them. Ideas for implementation and examples of different schools throughout the region currently using one of the three options are provided.

Block Scheduling

What's It All About?

It is difficult to be involved in education today and not hear about block scheduling. It is an educational trend that has gained favor in countless schools and communities throughout this extremely diverse nation. Of the three scheduling options discussed in this booklet, block scheduling is the one most widely used in the Northwest. Schools adopt block schedules because they offer an opportunity to redefine the way teachers teach and the way in which students learn. In addition, block scheduling is an option that does not greatly affect the community, nor is it expensive to implement.

In its simplest definition, block scheduling is any schedule format with fewer but longer classes than traditional schedules permit (Jones, 1995). Because a school can build a block schedule that suits its unique needs, there are almost as many different ways to arrange a block schedule as there are schools. Some of the more popular methods that schools base their schedules on are:

- **The intensive block:** In this format, students attend two core classes at a time. These core classes can be coupled with up to three other year-long elective classes. Students complete the core classes in 60 days and then move on to another two. School years are organized into trimesters (Jones, 1995; Canady & Rettig, 1995).
- **The 4x4 block:** This format enables students to attend four classes per day, each lasting anywhere from 85-100 minutes. Students complete in one semester what would have taken them a full year in traditional schedules (Jones, 1995; Rettig & Canady, 1996; Canady & Rettig, 1995).

- **The alternating plan (also known as the A/B plan):** Using this format, students attend eight blocks of classes over two days (Jones, 1995; Rettig & Canady, 1996; Canady & Rettig, 1995).
- **The modified block:** This is sort of a "build your own block schedule" format. For example, schools may have students attend school based on a 4x4 block on Monday through Thursday, and a regular eight-period schedule on Friday. Or, they might have two blocked classes in a day, combined with three regular periods (Rettig & Canady, 1996).
- **The parallel block:** The parallel block is used primarily in elementary schools, whereas the previous four formats are used primarily in secondary schools. Parallel block takes a class of students and divides them into two groups. One group of children stay with their classroom teacher for instruction in an academically demanding subject such as math or language arts, while the other group attends physical education or music, or visits the computer lab; after a prescribed length of time the two groups swap. This schedule provides all students with a more individual learning experience (Canady, 1990).

What Are The Benefits of Block Scheduling?

There are numerous benefits associated with block scheduling. Because few schools structure their block schedules in the exact same way, the benefits each experiences will be a little different. Following is a list of frequently mentioned attributes of block systems for students, teachers, and the school overall.

STUDENTS:

- Are exposed to a variety of instructional techniques that provide them with more opportunities for reinforcement, making them more likely to understand and master difficult concepts (Shortt & Thayer, 1995; Rettig & Canady, 1996).
- May experience improved grades and test scores (Schoenstein, 1995; Buckman, King, & Ryan, 1995).
- Often have better attendance rates and fewer tardies (Schoenstein, 1995; Buckman et al., 1995; Rettig & Canady, 1996; Reid, 1996).
- Are less likely to experience academic failure (Schoenstein, 1995; Reid, 1996).
- Have fewer classes to prepare for (in the case of a 4x4 block), or more time to prepare for them (in the case of the A/B plan) (Huff, 1995).
- Can use their longer lunch blocks to have club meetings or participate in other activities that they would otherwise have to arrange for after school (Schoenstein, 1995).

TEACHERS:

- Encounter fewer students per day, teach fewer classes each day (but technically for more time over the course of an entire year), and have longer prep periods (Jones, 1995; Schoenstein, 1995; Rettig & Canady, 1996; Canady & Rettig, 1995).
- Are able to use a wide variety of instructional techniques (including interdisciplinary approaches) and move away from lecture methods (Rettig & Canady, 1996; Reid, 1996; Canady & Rettig, 1995).
- Are able to develop closer relationships with their students with the extended time spent in class each day (Canady & Rettig, 1995).

- Can use their longer lunch blocks and/or prep periods for meeting and planning time (Schoenstein, 1995).

THE SCHOOL IN GENERAL:

- Experiences a more positive climate (Schoenstein, 1995; Buckman et al., 1995; Reid, 1996).
- Has an environment with fewer distractions because classes change only two or three times a day. This results in fewer disciplinary infractions, and a cleaner school (Rettig & Canady, 1996; Reid, 1996; Buckman et al., 1995; Canady & Rettig, 1995).
- May use fewer text books (Reid, 1996).
- Often receives strong support from both students and parents (Reid, 1996).

What Are the Concerns?

- Some critics of block scheduling are concerned that music and advanced placement courses will not be effectively integrated into the schedule (Schoenstein, 1995; Rettig & Canady, 1996). Though it takes some maneuvering, both can be successfully included in the block. For example, some schools on the 4x4 block alternate music with another class throughout the year. This eases concerns about music lasting only one semester. Other schools divide their advanced placement courses into a 1.5 credit class one semester, and a .5 credit class the other. This eases the concern of students having to take the advanced placement exam months after they have completed their coursework (Schoenstein, 1995; Rettig & Canady, 1996).
- It is also important that educators be given ample time for staff development prior to implementing the block. If a school does not have the means to do this, then it is not wise to proceed with the change (Jones, 1995; Shortt & Thayer,

1995). Teachers should not be expected to start teaching in blocks as experts; they need to be prepared.

- As a final caveat, it is important to note that block scheduling is still relatively new to education. Much of the student achievement data available on the block format is largely anecdotal. As with all education innovations, it will take time to determine the true outcomes.

Implementation Ideas

The following list details a few recommendations for any school contemplating the switch to block scheduling.

1. Study current research on block scheduling. Get as familiar with it as possible (Huff, 1995).
2. Visit other schools using the block (Huff, 1995; Buckman et al., 1995; Wyatt, 1996).
3. Survey the staff about their feelings toward the block; make sure they are in support of the change before proceeding. Without their approval, the change will be difficult to implement (Huff, 1995; Buckman et al., 1995; Wyatt, 1996). It is also important to win the approval of students and the community. They need be kept abreast of, and involved in, all important decisions.
4. Ensure teachers know that for students to be successful under the block, it will require them to alter their instructional methods. They will have to move away from lecturing and toward more active, hands-on teaching strategies that take full advantage of longer class periods (Schoenstein, 1995; Rettig & Canady, 1996).
5. Provide teachers with ample time for staff development. They will most likely be nervous about the change, and need time and resources to figure out how they will adapt (Jones, 1995; Shortt & Thayer, 1995). Some suggestions include:

- Have teachers meet in groups prior to implementation of the block schedule to write sample 90-minute lesson plans and curriculum guides to share with one another (Schoenstein, 1995).
- Access different resources about block scheduling (videos, books, articles, etc.).
- Develop course-pacing guides that walk teachers through their new schedules (Shortt & Thayer 1995; Rettig & Canady, 1996).
- In the end, teachers will learn best by simply doing. Initially, teachers should not create lesson plans for more than a couple weeks in advance. After this, they will be more aware of how best to pace their classes and structure their lessons (Wyatt, 1996).

6. When designing the actual schedule, keep course-sequencing issues in mind. Also, accreditation and teacher contract policies and requirements must be adhered to (Shortt & Thayer, 1995).
7. Have a policy in place that smoothly transitions transfer students from traditional schedules to the block schedule (Shortt & Thayer, 1995).
8. Continually monitor the effects of the new schedule on teaching and learning. Keep an open line of communication with all education stakeholders (Shortt & Thayer, 1995; Reid, 1996).

Regardless of how and why a school goes about implementing a block schedule, it is important to know that any attempt to change what is traditional will likely generate criticism. Keep this in mind before, during, and after the process has been implemented (Huff, 1995). Involving stakeholders at each stage of the decisionmaking and planning can minimize the criticism.

Four-Day School Week

What's It All About?

The motivating force behind a school changing to a four-day week is quite different than that which causes a school to adopt a block schedule. Faced with dwindling financial resources and declining enrollments, many small school districts have adopted a four-day school schedule (Grau & Shaughnessy, 1987; Koki, 1992; School Fits, 1983; Richberg & Sjorgren, 1983; Blankenship, 1984). By extending the time spent in school for four days, (by approximately 25 percent or 75 minutes per day) they are able to close the school on the fifth. Instead of cutting art, music, or other activities that often fall prey to budgetary shortfalls, the four-day week gives schools the opportunity to preserve these classes and still save money. Generally schools that use a four-day week are small, rural schools. In the Northwest, Oregon is the only state with schools using a four-day schedule. More than a dozen districts there currently observe a four-day week. Other states, including Washington, Idaho, and Montana do not have legislation that permits four-day week schedules.

Most often, schools that switch to a four-day week take either Friday or Monday off. Those choosing to close on Friday say that it is best because such a large portion of the student population misses school due to athletic events and other activities on this day. Those choosing to close school on Monday do so because gymnasiums often have to be lit and heated for Friday athletic events and activities, whereas few such activities occur on Mondays (Blankenship, 1984). Regardless of which day schools close, the decision to switch to a four-day week should be "based on clearly defined purposes and a recognition of both costs and benefits" (Richberg & Sjorgren, 1983).

What Are The Benefits of a Four-Day Week?

Though financially motivated, most schools that adopt a four-day week have serendipitously discovered numerous benefits they didn't quite expect. Following is a list of the advantages of the four-day week that many schools have encountered for students, teachers, and the school in general.

STUDENTS AND TEACHERS:

- Student drop-out rates decline (Litke, 1994; Grau & Shaughnessy, 1987).
- Student disciplinary referrals decrease (Koki, 1992).
- Student achievement is generally not affected either positively or negatively (Nelson, 1983; Daly & Richburg, 1984).
- Student and teacher attendance improves (Blankenship, 1984; Litke, 1994; Koki, 1992; Grau & Shaughnessy, 1987; Sagness & Salzman, 1993; Featherstone, 1991).
- Students and teachers benefit from less interrupted class time as a result of longer class periods and fewer transitions at all grade levels. This increases the efficiency of instruction (Blankenship, 1984; Koki, 1992; Grau & Shaughnessy, 1987; Culbertson, 1982).
- Students and teachers share more positive attitudes about school. Consequently, there is a marked improvement in school morale (Blankenship, 1984; Litke, 1994; Grau & Shaughnessy, 1987).
- School faculty has more time for quality staff development (often the day off is used for this purpose) (Blankenship, 1984; Litke, 1994).

- There is more time for participation in extracurricular activities and for personal business, such as doctor appointments (Litke, 1994; Koki, 1992; Grau & Shaughnessy, 1987; Culbertson, 1982).

THE SCHOOL IN GENERAL:

- Has significant savings on utility bills, substitute teacher pay, school buses, and building wear and tear (Blankenship, 1984; Richberg & Sjogren, 1983; Koki, 1992; Grau & Shaughnessy, 1987; Culbertson, 1982; Sagness & Salzman, 1993; Featherstone, 1991).
- Can make up school days missed due to inclement weather on what would have been the fifth school day instead of at the end of the school year (Blankenship, 1984; Litke, 1994).
- Experiences fewer distractions; learning is less broken up by athletic events or other school activities (Blankenship, 1984; Sagness & Salzman, 1993; Featherstone, 1991).

What Are the Concerns?

Weighing both the advantages and the possible disadvantages of any new scheduling format is critical to making an informed decision. Some of the concerns associated with the four-day week that are important to note include:

- Child care issues: While some parents like the four-day week because they prefer having to find good child care one day a week, others dislike it for the very same reason and prefer to arrange for child care in smaller increments of time. Some schools have alleviated this concern by using high school students as baby-sitters for those in need (Blankenship, 1984).

- Primary-aged students: There is often concern as to how young students will respond to such a long school day. As a result, many schools structure the day so the afternoon is composed of less academic work than the morning, thus allowing students to have some "down time" (Blankenship, 1984).
- At-risk students: Some teachers feel that at-risk and special-needs students may have retention difficulties with an extra day off each week (Blankenship, 1984; Culbertson, 1982).
- School reform movement: Some educators are concerned that the four-day week may appear to be inconsistent with the new emphasis for more time in school (Blankenship, 1984).
- The four-day week will take more of a local community commitment than other schedule options as it can affect daily community routines as well as the childrens'.

Implementation Ideas

When contemplating the decision to move to a four-day week, keep in mind that it is a multistep process. Some suggested steps for implementation are:

1. Become as familiar with the concepts and implications of a four-day week as possible. Read research and case studies. Talk to other administrators and teachers using this schedule.
2. Survey the staff; they must be involved in the decision-making process. If they aren't in favor of a four-day schedule, it will be difficult to proceed (Litke, 1994).
3. Get the endorsement of the students, parents, and community in addition to approval from teachers and administration, since this change will affect all of them as well (Litke, 1994).
4. Design the schedule to accommodate the needs of teachers and students. Make sure all changes stay within accreditation guidelines and teachers' contract requirements.

5. Some restructuring and repacing of the curriculum will be necessary. Involve school staff; this will give them ownership of the process and also help them to feel more ready for the change. Provide ample time for staff development (Richberg & Sjogren, 1983; Featherstone, 1991).
6. Once the schedule is in place, monitor its effects frequently. Keep communication open between administrators, teachers, students, and parents.
7. Allow a sufficient trial period before making any final recommendations on the schedule (Blankenship, 1984).
8. If possible, use the day off as an opportunity to provide students in need with enrichment activities or additional instruction (Koki, 1992).

Year-Round Education

What's It All About?

Communities are often motivated to select year-round calendars due to booming student enrollment and a lack of funding to construct new school buildings. Even though year-round education may seem like an educational innovation, it has actually been around for quite some time. At the beginning of this century, population centers such as New York and Baltimore were sites of year-round education programs. A shift in societal needs, coupled with a largely agrarian society, altered the school calendar and made it what it is today (White, 1995; Dlugosh, 1994; Bradford, 1993). Because we are no longer bound to agrarian calendars, many educators now feel that rearranging or even extending the school year can increase opportunities and better achievement for all students (White, 1995). There are about a dozen districts divided among the Northwest states of Idaho, Oregon, and Washington that have at least one school currently using a year-round/modified calendar, but it is not a widespread trend at this time.

To fully appreciate year-round education, it helps to understand some of the different formats it can accommodate. Generally, on a year-round calendar, students attend school for a prescribed length of time (this can be 45, 60, or 90 days), and then have a vacation, often referred to as an intercession. This break commonly lasts 15 days, but can be as long as 20, 30, or even 40 days. Some of the more common configurations are: 45 days on—15 days off, 60-15 (with most of July off), 60-20, and 90-30 (Serifs, 1990). Student tracks are another important aspect of year-round systems. Tracks are the groups students are divided into which share the same schedule rotation. A school can have up to four or possibly even more tracks, and as few as one,

though it is the staggered rotation of multiple tracks that enable schools to combat overcrowding.

What are the Benefits of Year-Round Education?

Today, year-round scheduling is used largely to combat severe overcrowding as an alternative to expensive building plans that can cost taxpayers millions of dollars, though this is not always the case (Schnieder & Townley, 1992; Levine & Ornstein, 1993). Some districts choose year-round calendars because of the benefits it has for students. As with other schedule changes, educators have found that there are numerous advantages associated with year-round calendars. The following list details the common benefits of year-round programs to students, teachers, and the community.

STUDENTS:

- Benefit from a more continuous learning pattern, and a reduced need for review (Serifs, 1990; Dlugosh, 1994; Bradford, 1993; Morse, 1992; Levine & Ornstein, 1993; O'Neil & Adamson, 1993).
- Can benefit from optional remediation programs offered during intercessions as opposed to lengthy repetition during regular session that might put them behind other students. Intercessions can also provide a means for enrichment activities for all students (Serifs, 1990; Dlugosh, 1994; Bradford, 1993).
- May have a marked improvement in their overall school performance, especially if they come from a home environment that does not reinforce school learning (Morse, 1992).
- Often feel more enthusiastic and motivated about school (O'Neil & Adamson, 1993).

TEACHERS:

- Experience less burnout and fatigue, just as students do, as a result of the shorter instructional cycles (Levine & Ornstein, 1993).
- Are absent from school less (Serifs, 1990; Goldman, 1990).
- Spend less time reviewing material they have already taught.
- Can earn extra income by teaching during the intercessions (Serifs, 1990; Levine & Ornstein, 1993).

THE SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY:

- Save money by choosing the year-round model over new construction, and can increase the school capacity by 25 percent (Serifs, 1990; Dlugosh, 1994; O'Neil & Adamson, 1993).
- Experience less vandalism that can occur during long summer breaks (Serifs, 1990).
- See less incidence of juvenile delinquency (Serifs, 1990).

What Are the Concerns?

Of the three scheduling alternatives discussed in this booklet, year-round schedules are probably the most challenging to implement. Saving money by maximizing school building utilization should not be the sole motivation behind adopting a year-round schedule (Glines, 1987). Implementing a year-round calendar is a complicated process that requires the commitment not only from school staff and students, but from parents and the community as well. The whole community surrounding a year-round school or district will be affected. In order for educators to convince parents and the community that a year-round model should be implemented, they will need to counter many old arguments about time in school and present logical, com-

pelling reasons about the benefits of modifying the traditional school calendar (Dlugosh, 1994). Just as important as knowing the benefits, however, is knowing about possible difficulties. Educators must be fully aware of the complications often associated with year-round scheduling in order to communicate effectively with the community and to create a successful program. Some of these are outlined in the following list:

- The initial cost of setting up a year-round program may be high. Renovations, such as extra storage and air conditioning, are a must in order for the program to run smoothly (Serifs, 1990).
- Some of the savings resulting from year-round programs will be offset by increased district costs, such as more school office staff or additional teaching staff (Serifs, 1990).
- There will be less time for large-scale cleaning and maintenance (Serifs, 1990).
- There will be more wear and tear on the building (Serifs, 1990).
- The scheduling process itself is quite complex and will need careful management (Goldman, 1990).
- Unless the school is using a single track plan, every school function that occurs, including parent conferences, faculty meetings, and open houses, will have to be done more than once because one segment of the school population will always be gone (Goldman, 1990; Moore, 1992).
- Careful coordination with district specialist services (i.e., speech therapists, occupational therapists, or other consultants) will be necessary, as most of them do not normally work with students over the summer (Moore, 1992).
- Parents may become frustrated if their children do not have common vacation times (Levine & Ornstein, 1993; O'Neil & Adamson, 1993).

- Multiple-track systems require extensive packing between sessions as classrooms are often shared (O'Neil & Adamson, 1993).
- Continuing education coursework may be difficult for teachers to pursue.

Implementation Ideas

Because of the complexity of implementing a year-round schedule, it is important to be aware of several suggested steps. They are as follows:

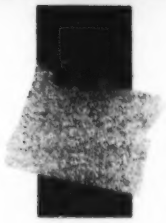
1. Become familiar with research and information on year-round calendars. Visit other year-round schools. Find out as much as possible about the pros and cons, and how these relate to current district needs.
2. Involve all local education stakeholders in the decision-making process. This should include teachers, students, parents, classified staff, and the community. Keeping them informed throughout the process will minimize conflict (Serifs, 1990; Bradford, 1993; Schnieder & Townley, 1992).
3. Remember that it is most critical to have the support of teachers; if they are not in favor of the decision, there is little probability that it will be successful (Schnieder & Townley, 1992).
4. When designing the actual schedule, consider the following (White, 1995):
   - The configuration of the calendar; will it be 45-15, 60-15, or something else?
   - The number of student tracks that will work best with the chosen configuration
   - The number of holidays during the year

- The unique needs of the school and community; build a schedule that best suits them

5. Provide ample time for staff development. The year-round schedule will require extensive changes in everything from facilities logistics to the pacing of classes (Serifs, 1990).
6. Be prepared to deal with curricula concerns such as course sequencing and continuity, and student remediation and enrichment (Serifs, 1990).
7. If possible, make the program voluntary during its initial stages. Also, let parents have a say in what track their children will be in; give them as many choices as possible (Serifs, 1990; Bradford, 1993).
8. Assure that the new schedule is in line with accreditation and teacher contract requirements.
9. Monitor the program continuously; be flexible and attentive to the needs of all involved.
10. Do not rush implementation and do not make any hasty evaluations. Accurate assessment of the program will take time (Serifs, 1990).

THE NORTHWEST SAMPLER

Several schools' alternative methods of scheduling are described on the following pages. They are located in the Northwest states of Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. These programs are just a few of the many excellent ones found in the region and throughout the country. The programs vary widely in scope. Some have been in existence for several years, while others are fledgling efforts. Included for each site is location and contact information, observed outcomes as a result of the scheduling, a description of the program, and tips directly from these educators for others looking to implement similar changes in their schools.



Block Schedule
(4x4 modified plan)

Program Location

La Grande High School
708 K Avenue
La Grande, OR 97850

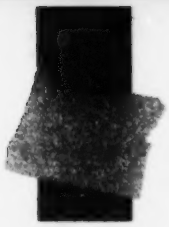
Contact

Roland Bevell, Principal
Phone: 541/963-1966
Fax: 541/963-0860

Program Description

During the 1991-92 school year, teachers at La Grande High School began investigating scheduling alternatives for their 900-student school. With the support of the administration and district, they began a process that would eventually result in one of Oregon's first block-scheduled schools. La Grande teachers reviewed current research, and received a 21st Century Schools Grant that enabled them to visit other block-schedule schools around the country. With this information, the staff built a unique block schedule, capable of meeting the needs of students, teachers, and the community.

The schedule consists of four 88-minute block periods, and a 58-minute lunch period. Teachers instruct three classes per day and use the remaining 88-minute block for preparation work. Students complete classes in one semester what in previous years would have taken them an entire year. Generally, schedules for each student are balanced to provide them with both electives and more academically rigorous classes.

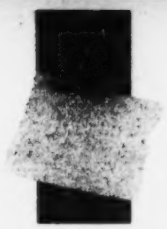


At La Grande, music classes are alternated with other select classes. For example, a student might spend 88 minutes in band on Monday, and then 88 minutes in the yearbook class or personal finance on Tuesday. Alternating the classes in this way allows students to make the most of band, choir, and orchestra throughout the year, while maintaining the structure of the block.

La Grande's block schedule also provides time for teacher access days and faculty forums. Two Wednesdays out of each month, from 7:30 to 8:45 a.m., are set aside as teacher access days. During this time teachers are available for one-on-one tutorials with students. School data shows that teacher access days have a 30-50 percent student participation rate.

The other two Wednesdays of each month are devoted to faculty forums from 7:30 to 9:30 a.m. Faculty forums provide opportunities for teachers to discuss school issues, to continually evaluate the block-scheduling process, and to share strategies and tips for success. Many curriculum issues are also discussed and worked on at this time.

An extensive study of the schedule changes at La Grande was conducted during the 1995-96 school year by the Eastern Oregon State College Regional Services Institute. The study, which included surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions, showed that the majority of students, former students, teachers, and parents support the block schedule and the other schedule-related changes the school has implemented. Student grade point averages have gone up, while disciplinary referrals have gone down. Teachers who once relied on basic lecture techniques to deliver lessons have become innovative facilitators of learning—continually challenging themselves and their students.



Observed Outcomes

- The block schedule has helped to facilitate a more humane environment for students and staff.
- Students are learning better in the block schedule with longer periods of time to interact with staff and each other.
- Teachers do a better job of instructing; they do not have to go back and reteach every day.
- The school and classroom environments have improved because of decreased student movement (in switching classes) and nonacademic interaction with each other.

Keys to Success

- Get support from the administration and the board.
- The change process is slow; a three- to five-year period is needed in order for it to gain full acceptance and for success to be realized.
- The staff must support the change.
- Necessitate open communication with parents and students.

Block Schedule (Alternating Plan)

Location

Frenchtown High School
17620 Frenchtown Frontag
Frenchtown, MT 59834

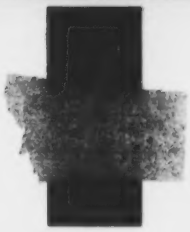
Contact

Steve Chiavaro, Principal
Phone: 406/626-5222
Fax: 406/626-1982

Description

Five years ago, staff at Frenchtown High School, in a near-unanimous vote, decided to make the switch from traditional scheduling to an alternate-day block schedule. They felt that the traditional eight-period schedule was limiting. Many also felt that they had grown stagnant in their profession over the years, and that this would be just the challenge to put the spark back into their careers.

The flexibility of the block has provided students and staff at Frenchtown with many benefits including more opportunities for interdisciplinary learning and more time for teachers and students to get to know one another. Frenchtown has also used the schedule to structure a GED/work release program that could not have existed otherwise. In this program, students who are not successful in the regular school setting can work toward their GEDs and work at jobs on alternating days of the week. Overall, the school has found that the block schedule provides better opportunities for both college-prep and non-college-bound students.



Principal Steve Chiavaro notes the following cautions:

1. Teachers who struggle with classroom management using a traditional schedule will find block schedules to be even more challenging; provide all teachers with strategies to help them successfully adapt to the block.
2. Study halls are difficult to manage in 90-minute blocks.
3. Students who are prone to procrastination may find themselves sinking rapidly in an alternate-day block schedule.
4. Attendance becomes a much bigger issue when using a block schedule; traditional attendance policies may have to be modified along with the schedule when switching to the block.

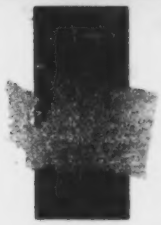
In the years since its implementation, the block has served the students and staff of Frenchtown well. A survey conducted two years ago indicated that 95 percent of students wanted to continue with the block schedule, and all but one teacher desired to do so. Teachers also report that the block has revived their excitement about teaching and that students seem to be more successful with it.

Observed Outcomes

- Teachers feel rejuvenated in their careers; the block has given them new challenges.
- Students react more positively toward school.
- The flexibility of the block can meet the needs of a diverse group of students and staff.

Keys to Success

- Tailor the schedule to your school's specific needs; don't be afraid to try something new.
- Involve all members of the school community in the assessment of the new schedule.



Block Schedule (4x4 plan)

Program Location

Skykomish High School
Box 325
Skykomish, WA 98288

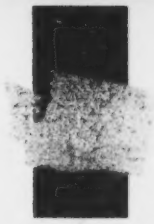
Contact

Don Emerson, Teacher
Phone: 360/677-2623
Fax: 360/677-2418

Program Description

With the realization that a seven-period day was spreading both teachers and students a little too thin, teachers at Skykomish High School in Skykomish, Washington, began investigating scheduling alternatives. The alternative they found best suited for their needs was block scheduling. The block schedule allows teachers and students to focus on fewer subjects. Now, instead of seven classes, they have only four. Teachers instruct three and use the fourth as a prep period. There is also a ten-minute home-room after lunch each day. Overall, students and teachers are in school 15 minutes more each day so there is more instruction time. Students can earn eight credits per year instead of six. In earlier years, many classes were only offered every other year in this small, rural school. Now with the block, each class is offered every year.

Most exciting are the changes the block has brought to teaching methods and the way students learn. Teachers feel that they have more time to reinforce instruction. Now students can learn



through hands-on, dynamic activities that give them more interaction with teachers and each other, instead of through traditional lecture/memorizing techniques. There have been very few complaints about the block schedule since its implementation at the beginning of this year.

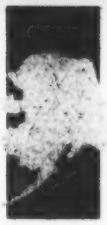
The switch to block scheduling has been a positive experience for students and teachers at Skykomish. Though they are still in the initial stages of implementation, they are confident that it has been a change that has improved the day-to-day operations of the school and the education of students.

Observed Outcomes

- The block schedule has provided more time for varied learning activities.
- Because of the extra time provided under the block for reinforcement, teachers have noticed some test scores rising.

Keys to Success

- Provide teachers with training in alternative teaching methods that are suited for block scheduling.
- Strongly discourage student absences as they are deadly to grades in block scheduling.
- Notify parents weekly or biweekly regarding student progress; with the faster pace of the block, students can fall behind quickly.



Block Schedule (Parallel)

Program Location

Mountain View Elementary School
315 Swires Road
Kenai, AK 99611

Contact

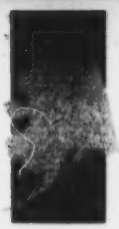
Jim Dawson, Principal
Phone: 907/283-6148
Fax: 907/283-9340

Description

Four years ago, Mountain View Elementary School received a grant from the Alaska Department of Education to implement a parallel block schedule. The motivation behind parallel block scheduling is simple: Decrease the number of students each teacher sees, and thus increase the amount of one-on-one attention each child receives.

Each grade (Mountain View serves students in grades 3-5) is allotted an hour of "block" per day. During this hour, students spend part of their time in either math or language arts, and part of the time in either P.E., music, or library. Students from each class are split into two groups, with one group attending the math/language arts portion and the other attending the P.E./music/library portion. After about 30 minutes the two groups switch.

This arrangement has worked well at Mountain View because students have increased opportunities to receive personalized



instruction. Because most schools do not have the means to reduce class size as they would like, parallel block scheduling is a feasible alternative that is not difficult to implement. Though teachers at Mountain View were skeptical of the arrangement at first, they, along with the community, are firmly in support of it now.

Observed Outcomes

- Disciplinary interactions have been reduced.
- Student-to-teacher ratios are lower.
- Teachers can consistently use cooperative learning activities and manipulatives.
- Time on task has increased.

Keys to Success

- Necessitate open communication with staff and parents.
- Ensure staff support the new schedule; if they aren't in favor, it will be difficult to proceed.
- Commit all key stakeholders to reducing class size.
- Involve the specials (P.E., library, music, computer) teachers in the decisionmaking process.
- Remain flexible throughout the process.

Four-Day School Week

Program Location

Cove School District
P.O. Box 68
Cove, OR 97824

Contact

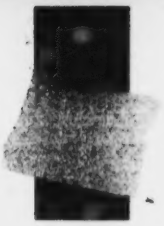
John Ott, Administrative Assistant
Phone: 541/568-4424
Fax: 541/568-4348

Description

Thirteen years ago, Cove School District in rural Northeast Oregon shifted to a four-day week in response to reduced funding and low student enrollment. The schedule has worked very well for students, teachers, and the community.

Students in grades kindergarten-12 attend school Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., with the last 30 minutes reserved for meetings, clubs, and other activities. Primary students are released at 3 p.m. By reducing lunchtime and the time spent between classes, Cove students spend as much time in school as when they attended five days a week.

Along with the financial savings, there are numerous other benefits associated with the four-day schedule. Because Fridays can be used for athletic events and other school-related activities, there are fewer interruptions in learning Monday through Thursday. Teachers also can use Fridays as an extra work day. Many teachers can be found at school on Friday planning lessons, conducting meetings, or working on other classroom projects.



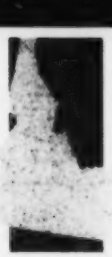
In the years since its inception in Cove, the four-day school week has been widely accepted by all local education stakeholders. Instead of making student services and activities the target of education cutbacks, the schedule has enabled this small community to continue to provide students with a quality education, full of opportunity and challenge.

Observed Outcomes

- There is less interruption from athletic events.
- CTBS scores have remained stable.
- There has been financial savings in electricity, transportation, and food services.
- Fridays can be used for staff inservice.

Keys to Success

- Minimize interruptions in school.
- Assign homework projects over the extended weekend instead of on Monday or Tuesday.



YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION

LOCATION

Pioneer Elementary School
13255 West McMillian
Boise, ID 83713

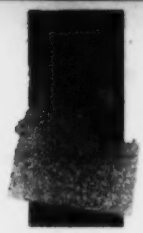
CONTACT

John Mikkolsen, Principal
Phone: 208/939-2111
Fax: 208/939-2118

DESCRIPTION

On August 3, 1992, the Meridian School District, in Meridian, Idaho, opened its first year-round school at Pioneer Elementary. Prior to its opening, many staff and parents were interested in the concept of a modified school calendar. In addition, it seemed that overcrowding would soon become an issue in their rapidly growing community. Research and investigation into the subject led the district to approve the year-round modified schedule. Instead of choosing one of its already existent schools to be the home of the modified calendar, the district selected its new elementary school as the site, thus avoiding the conflict that might have arisen had they tried to change the schedule of an existing school.

Because the district was not sure what the response to the modified calendar would be, enrollment at the school was initially optional and opened to everyone in the district. Little did they know that response to the new school would be overwhelming. The district ended up having to limit the student transportation it provided in order to reduce the number of students who enrolled.



Today, Pioneer runs on a five-track, 60-15 schedule. Every three weeks one track of students and teachers goes on vacation. The 60-15 plan allows a schoolwide break during the month of July. This promotes a fresh start feeling in August, and also works well with families' summer vacation schedules. Building maintenance, that would otherwise be difficult to accomplish in an occupied building, can be done in July.

Overall, students, teachers, and parents have adjusted well to the year-round modified calendar. The school has been so successful in fact, that three of the district's four new schools, opening in the fall of 1997, will be year-round schools.

Observed Outcomes

- Students and teachers spend much less time getting into the routine of school as a result of the shorter, more frequent breaks in comparison to students on traditional calendars who have one very long summer break.
- Students experience less learning loss when attending school on a modified calendar.
- Students and teachers experience less burnout.

Keys to Success

- Design a calendar that works well for the community.
- Make sure that the general school community is committed to trying something different.
- Obtain support from the school district administration. The modified calendar has far-reaching effects on school operations.
- Everyone in the school community must accept that the modified calendar school will require things be done differently than on the traditional calendar school.

YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION

PROGRAM LOCATION

Oakwood Elementary School
525 S. 4th, E.
Preston, ID 83263

CONTACT

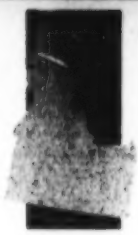
Dr. Jerry Waddoups, Principal
Phone: 208/852-3976
Fax: 208/852-2233

DESCRIPTION

Fifteen years ago, due to an extreme overcrowding problem, Oakwood Elementary School in Preston, Idaho, shifted to a year-round calendar. In the 1997-98 school year, Oakwood will return to a traditional calendar. To fully understand why the school implemented the year-round concept, and why it will abandon it, it is important to examine the process from the beginning.

The early 1980s brought a time of economic uncertainty for many in the growing Preston community. Though the schools were bursting at the seams, the community would not approve a bond levy to increase funding for new school construction. With no money to build a new school to ease the crowding, the district was forced to examine other alternatives, including year-round education. Preston community members selected the year-round calendar.

Oakwood began its year-round format with a 45-15, four-track schedule. It soon became clear, however, that this was not the most suitable format for the school. Teachers were finding that they only had four or five days off between the end of one



school year and the start of another. Taking this into consideration, the school opted for a 60-15, five-track schedule. This enabled everyone to have almost the entire month of July off, thus giving teachers and students the feeling of a fresh start in August. It also provided a common vacation time for families who had kids with different school schedules.

Some of the many benefits experienced by teachers and students at Oakwood included a greatly reduced need for review, intercession periods that could be used for student remediation programs, and the option for added employment if teachers wanted to instruct during the intercession.

A new school building will open in Preston in the coming fall. The opening of its doors ends concerns about overcrowding in the district. Without overcrowding as a problem, local education stakeholders once again were faced with a decision to choose what calendar Oakwood would follow. Though the year-round calendar worked well at Oakwood for over a decade, the community opted for a traditional-school calendar instead. The primary reason for the change is to get the school back on the same schedule as the other schools in the district.

Observed Outcomes

- Students and teachers do not feel the winter burnout that their traditional-calendar counterparts may feel.
- There is less need for review of previous-grade materials.
- Periods of work and rest contribute to good learning.
- Teachers don't like moving to different rooms during the year.

Keys to Success

- Planning, planning, planning! It is crucial to be very organized.
- Ensure all staff is flexible.
- Make certain staff is willing to accept change and be committed to teamwork.
- Emphasize open communication between staff, students, and parents.

Conclusion

The schedule a school follows is a very important component of student learning, and with so many scheduling options available it is easy to become lost in a maze of research and recommendations without arriving at any real conclusion. Unfortunately, there is no easy way of knowing what is best. What works well in one school may not work at all in another. However, careful study of options, coupled with shared decision-making on the part of all education stakeholders will help schools to make the best decision for students.

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Published quarterly for NWREL member institutions

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101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500
Portland, Oregon 97204

This publication is based on work sponsored wholly, or in part, by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), Department of Education, under contract no RJ96006501. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views of OERI, the department, or any other agency of the U.S. government.